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ACTION AID-00

RELEASED IN PART

B1, 1.4(D)

INFO LOG-00 NP-00 AMAD-00 CIAE-00 INL-00 DODE-00 WHA-00
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NSC FOR CBARTON
USCINCSO ALSO FOR POLAD
USAID DCHA/OTI FOR RPORTER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/27/2014
TAGS: PGOV, KDEM, VE
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S TRIP TO MARACAIBO

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ABELARDO A. ARIAS FOR REASONS 1.4 (d
)

SUMMARY

1. (C) On June 5, the Ambassador traveled to Maracaibo,
Zulia State, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] told him that the pro-Chavez gubernatorial
candidate suffers from incredibly low support ratings and has
few prospects in Zulia's upcoming elections. At a lunch

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[REDACTED]
voiced concern over the date of the recall referendum and
asserted that holding the referendum on August 15 could lead
to delays beyond August 19 deadline. When interviewed by a
Panorama journalist, the Ambassador emphasized that the U.S.
will only respect the results of the recall referendum if
there is a clean and transparent electoral process.
End Summary.

-- UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
CLASSIFIED BY DEPT. OF STATE, L. R. LOHMAN, DAS, A/ISS
REVIEW AUTHORITY: ALAN H FLANIGAN
CLASSIFICATION: CONFIDENTIAL REASON: 1.4(D)
DECLASSIFY AFTER: 27 MAY 2014
DATE/CASE ID: 21 MAR 2007 200503244

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[REDACTED] OBSERVATIONS

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2. (C) On June 5, the Ambassador traveled to Maracaibo, Zulia State, where he met with [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] reflected that he has established working relationships with Zulia Governor Manuel Rosales and the GoV, and that what is most important is not allowing continued political polarization to affect the business climate. The Ambassador and [REDACTED] discussed the pro-Chavez gubernatorial candidate for Zulia, retired National Guard General Alberto Gutierrez. [REDACTED] that Gutierrez suffers from low support ratings and has few prospects in upcoming elections. (The Ambassador had a meeting scheduled with Gutierrez, but Gutierrez canceled, saying he had been called to Caracas. In fact, he did not leave for Caracas until the following day.) [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] He maintains good relations with both President Chavez and Gov. Rosales.

PANORAMA INTERVIEW

3. (U) The Ambassador granted also gave an interview to a journalist from Panorama after meeting [REDACTED] Asked about the recall referendum, the Ambassador remarked that the U.S. will only respect the results of the recall referendum if there is a clean and transparent electoral process. The Ambassador reiterated U.S. commitment to a peaceful, democratic, constitutional and electoral solution to the current political crisis in Venezuela. The Ambassador also expressed hope that the recall referendum would lead to an improvement in bilateral relations between the U.S. and Venezuela, and that commented that cooperation on more technical issues such as immigration and trade could serve as a first step toward reconciliation.

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CONCERNS OVER THE REFERENDUM

4. (SBU) The Ambassador attended a lunch hosted by [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] The recall referendum and the reparos process were central topics of conversation. Concern was voiced over the as yet undefined date of the recall referendum. Holding the

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referendum on August 15 as the GoV proposes, they said, could lead to delays beyond August 19. Those in attendance were also apprehensive about the potential for political violence during and after the recall referendum. This anxiety stems in part from the March 6 murder of a local Accion Democratica leader, Evangelina Carrizo, in Machiques, Zulia State.

[REDACTED]

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5. (SBU) The lunch guests discussed the field of candidates for Zulia's upcoming gubernatorial election. As stated by [REDACTED] they too maintained that pro-Chavez candidate Gen. Gutierrez only had a public opinion rating between 22% and

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25%. All thought that he would not pose a substantial threat to Governor Rosales. It was also noted that former governor of Zulia (and rival opposition candidate), Francisco Arias Cardenas had received less than 5% of the votes in public polling.

COMMENT

6. (C) The key force in Zulia politics is Gov. Rosales. The state chapter of the Coordinadora Democratica is moribund. Rosales is the opposition. The state is heavily anti-Chavista and Venezuelans ratified more signatures in the appeals process than in any other state. Chavez regularly accuses Rosales of being both a golpista and a secessionist.

[REDACTED]

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